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SUBJECT: BRAZIL ANNOUNCES DRAMATIC DECLINE IN AMAZON DEFORESTATION

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¶1. (U) THIS CABLE IS SENSITIVE, BUT UNCLASSIFIED, AND IT IS NOT INTENDED FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY. Brazil reports a sharp decline, 25 percent, in its rate of deforestation for the year 2006. Further, it estimates that the rate will drop another 30% in 2007. END SUMMARY.

CONTINUING DECLINES IN THE DEFORESTATION RATE

¶3. (SBU) The Government of Brazil (GoB) states that the rate of deforestation of the Amazon rainforest declined 25% for the year 2006 (the period between August, 2005 and July 2006), when compared to the same period the previous year. The numbers were announced by Environmental Minister Marina Silva together with three other Ministers during a news conference on August 10, 2007. In addition, she announced that seven out of the nine states in Brazil's Amazon region had deforestation rate reductions. Further, the Ministry of Science and Technology calculates that this reduction avoided 410 million tons of CO2 emissions, the destruction of 600 million trees and 20,000 birds.

¶4. (SBU) At the same news conference, Minister Silva also presented estimated figures for the deforestation rate in 2007. The GoB preliminary estimates for 2007 indicate another 30% reduction in the deforestation rate for the Amazon region. An estimated 9,600 square km of the rainforest were cleared in the current year that ended July 31, 2007 compared to a revised 14,039 square km, the previous year. If the estimates are confirmed, the rate will be the lowest figure since 1988, when the country's satellite monitoring system was implemented. A final report is expected to be ready by November, 2007. If confirmed, this would mark the third year in a row of major drops in the rate of deforestation.

REACTIONS TO ANNOUNCEMENT

¶5. (SBU) In late August, Minister of External Affairs Celso Amorim declared that 15 years after the Rio 92 environment conference, GoB measures have resulted in an overall 50% decline in the deforestation rate of the Amazon. He later told a Brazilian congressional committee that Brazil was no longer in a defensive posture on climate change, it would now go into a offensive mode.

¶6. (SBU) More control on illegal logging, improved certification of land ownership, and economic development projects that preserve the forest are the main reasons driving the deforestation rate down, said President's Chief of Staff Dilma Rousseff during the August 10 news conference. All of these actions are part of the

implementation of the first phase of GoB's Plan for the Control of the Deforestation Rate of the Amazon (PPCDA), which started in 2004.

Minister Silva stated that for the second phase of the plan the rate reduction process will continue trying to reach a zero percent illegal deforestation rate.

7 (SBU) In recent meeting with ESTH officers in the Brazilian Ministry of Environment, Secretary for Climate Change and Environmental Quality Thelma Krug said that the deforestation drop is result of action by governments at various levels, and better law enforcement and monitoring on behalf of the GoB.

18. (SBU) Some question the GoB statements about reducing the deforestation rates. The head of one national NGO working in the Amazon region, which has substantial expertise in the cartography field, points out that there has been a significant increase in fires in the region in the last year. The National Institute for Space Research (INPE) reported a 39 percent increase in the volume of fires in the Amazon comparing January 2006 to January 2005. Further, the NGO leader claimed that the GoB has poor monitoring of some of the most vulnerable areas to incursion, such as along the western border in the state of Rondonia and on the northeastern border in the state of Amapa. This expert concluded that these factors point to a higher deforestation rate than the one announced by the GoB.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) The Lula Administration has clearly made reducing the deforestation rate a priority. And the GoB has taken measures to accomplish this goal: increased monitoring; raids on illegal logging; and expanded protected areas. We have noted improvements in forest management in many states - with some notable exceptions - and localities in the region. The GoB deserves credit for turning around what had been an alarming and accelerating rate of deforestation. The next set of challenges may well come as an unintended result of GoB's other priorities: a sharp increase in infrastructure projects (hydroelectric facilities, roads, etc.), and an emphasis on increasing sugar cane production. End Comment

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